

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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SUBJECT: FOOD SITUATION IN VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, SEPT 26-27, 1976

1. EMBOFF AND BRITISH EMBOFF VISITED CENTRAL MARKET (KOM'YAUNIMO STREET) IN VILNIUS AT ABOUT 10:30 SUNDAY MORNING (SEPT 26), BUT DID NOT COLLECT DETAILED PRICE INFORMATION SINCE THEY WERE WITH A LOCAL ACQUAINTANCE AND WERE BEING CONSPICUOUSLY SURVEILLED. MARKET WAS VERY CROWDED, WITH MOST CUSTOMERS IN THE FRUIT AND VEGATABLE AREA. THERE WAS ALSO BEEF AND PORK, BUT NO LAMB, AVAILABLE IN MORE-THAN-SUFFICIENT QUANTITY FOR THE CUSTOMERS IN THAT AREA. ABOUT HALF-A-DOZEN FRESH-KILLED CHICKENS WERE BEING OFFERED AT 6 - 8 RUBLES APIECE, BUT THERE DID NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY CUSTOMERS.

2. EMBOFF RETURNED MONDAY (SEPT 27) AT ABOUT 9:30 A.M. WIHTOUT LOCAL COMPANION. MEAT PAVILION WAS CLOSED, THERE WERE FAR FEWER STALLS OPERATING, FAR FEWER CUSTOMERS. ONE STALL HAD AN ENORMOUS QUANTITY OF ONIONS AT 70 KOPEKS/KILO (THE ONLY STALL FOR WHICH THE PREVIOUS DAY'S LINE HAD EXCEEDED THREE OR FOUR PEOPLE. EMBOFF'S LOCAL COMPANION HAD SAID THAT SELLER WAS A KOREAN. ONLY ONE OR TWO OTHER STALLS WERE OFFERING SMALL QUANTITIES OF ONIONS. PLUMS WERE 20-60 KOPEKS/KILO, CARROTS 13-15

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KOPEKS/KILO, CUCUMBERS (ONLY AT SEVERAL STALLS) WERE 1

RUBLE/KILO AND RIPE TOMATOES 1.50 RUBLES/KILO. CABBAGE WAS 8 KOPEKS FOR A LARGE HEAD. IN SHOPS ON ONE OF MAIN STREETS (PROSPEKT LENINA) GREEN TOMATOES WERE 60 KOPEKS/KILO; APPLES, 60 KOPEKS/KILO; BEETS, 14 KOPEKS/KILO; EGGS, 95 KOPEKS FOR 10; LEMONS WERE SELLING FOR 35 KOPEKS APIECE; AND PEPPERS 40 KOPEKS PER 1/2 KILO. ONLY TWO TYPES OF BREAD APPEARED TO BE AVAILABLE, LARGE BROWN LOAVES AT 36 KOPEKS AND WHITE "BATONI" AT 20 KOPEKS. BOTH TYPES WERE VERY TASTY.

3. BOTH LOCAL ACQUAINTANCES CONTACTED, AS WELL AS A LITHUANIAN TAXI DRIVER, SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE FOOD SITUATION IN LITHUANIA IS GOOD COMPARED WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE USSR, IT HAS DETERIORATED A GREAT DEAL OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, ESPECIALLY THE MEAT SITUATION. ONE ACQUAINTANCE REPORTED THE EXISTENCE OF A THRIVING, SEMI-UNDERGROUND TRADE BETWEEN LITHUANIA AND POLAND, WITH LITHUANIANS PROVIDING FOODSTUFFS TO POLISH VISITORS, WHO THEN SEND THEIR LITHUANIAN CONTACTS PARCELS OF RELATIVELY STYLISH POLISH CLOTHING. THIS ACQUAINTANCE, WHO IS NOT LITHUANIAN, SAID THAT THE RELATIVELY GOOD ECONOMIC SITUATION HAS, IN EFFECT, BOUGHT OFF MOST OF THE POPULATION; MOST OF THOSE WHO ACTIVELY EXPRESS DISSATISFACTION WITH SOVIET RULE ARE TEENAGERS AND STUDENTS. HOWEVER, THE AUTHORITIES ARE NOT SANGUINE AND TRY TO KEEP WESTERN INFLUENCE TO A MINIMUM. FOR INSTANCE, WHEN THE TAH EXHIBIT WAS IN MINSK, FACTORIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WHICH ATTEMPTED TO HIRE BUSES FOR GROUP OUTINGS FOR VILNIUS TO MINSK (ON OTHER PRETEXTS) FOUND THIS IMPOSSIBLE, THE EXCUSE BEING THAT THERE WAS AN EPIDEMIC OF GRIPPE IN MINSK.

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